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HOUGHTON TO MIDDLETON

THE COLONEL WITH VIGOR REPLIES TO THE GENERAL.

LONG BUT INTERESTING

Interesting Incidents of the Campaign of '85. Grave Charge Explained. Sir Fred. Middleton's conduct towards his Second in command as seen by the latter.

To the Military Editor of THE GAZETTE:

DEAR SIR.—Lieut.-Gen. Sir Fred Middleton having in his letter to the Toronto *Telegram*, dated 23rd February, flatly denied that there was even a "foundation of truth" in the statement contained in my letter in the Montreal *Gazette* of the 3rd February, "from beginning to end" goes on to say, "and I am somewhat surprised that some of my old comrades, who must have been aware of that have not interfered on behalf of their old chief." Having now waited three weeks since the publication of that letter in Toronto, in order to see if any of his "old comrades" would come forward in response to this pathetic appeal, and finding none apparently desirous of "breaking a lance" in his favor I think, I may consider myself justified in assuming that none purpose doing so. I shall now proceed to prove the truth of my statement "from beginning to end" and endeavor to show plainly and to the complete satisfaction of your interested readers, that in Gen. Sir F. Middleton's letter of the 23rd February he has himself completely

contradicted the offensive statement of which I complained, and the one, in fact, which drew forth my letter to which he replies.

He has shown the weakness of his case by endeavoring to draw a herring across his trail; by devoting the whole of the remainder of his letter (with which I am concerned, at least) to cowardly innuendos and insinuations against myself personally. I repeat *cowardly*, because he dares not now, nor ever did dare, to make any accusations to my face, or openly over his signature, as he well knows I could readily refute them; but he has persistently circulated calumnies behind my back, never affording me an opportunity to defend myself or clear my character from his base imputations. As, however, his false statements about me (at which he darkly hints again, but does not openly specify, in his letter under answer) have come to my knowledge indirectly at different times and places, as soon as I have dealt with the main question at issue, I purpose returning to this subject before concluding my letter, when I may have to refer to some mat-

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ters perhaps affecting General Middleton's own capacity, and veracity also. I do not, however, intend travelling in that direction, beyond what came under the scope of my own personal observation, and is absolutely necessary for the vindication of my character, so cruelly and wantonly maligned by the General, for a purely selfish purpose, which he now compels me to expose.

Now to return to the question, which for the greater convenience of dealing with it, I shall divide into two headings, namely: First—Was there actually a retreat to the last camp ordered by General Middleton? Was it commenced? And was it countermanded by him for the reasons stated in my letter which appeared in the *Montreal GAZETTE* on the 3rd of February.

Second—Was the following statement, made by General Middleton in his "Suppression of the North-west Rebellion, 1885," true or not? "Most, if not all, of my senior officers were of opinion that we were not strong enough, and ought to retire to our last camp and await reinforcements. I differed from them," etc.

In regard to the first of these headings, I may remind your readers that, in support of my denial of the "second," I made a plain statement of facts to the following effect, namely: That General Middleton had, upon the occasion referred to, in spite of my urgent remonstrance, compelled me to issue his orders for an "immediate retreat to our camp of the previous night," that I had done so under protest, and that the retreat had actually commenced and was in progress for about fifteen minutes or so before orders were again given me by the General for its countermand, in consequence of the refusal of Brigade-Surgeon Orton to move the wounded back over eight miles of a rough corduroy road in "farmers' waggons."

I now repeat most positively the truth of the above statement, and not only is it firmly and vigorously corroborated by Dr. Orton, but, in addition, I hold three letters from officers (two being field officers) who were present, all in good positions to know what was going on, as they had actually received the order for retreat and were on the move or getting ready for it. One (a lieutenant in charge of the ammunition waggons) had already retreated over five hundred yards before

receiving orders to halt, and he is willing to make oath to that effect, besides proving it by the testimony of some of the teamsters under his orders. The statements of the 'two field officers' are equally strong and conclusive, and both are also willing to testify in the same manner. These letters were all sent me quite unsolicited, and were it necessary for me to obtain further corroborative evidence I could very easily do so on short notice, but I considered it quite superfluous at the present stage of affairs to take this step, and so far I have not called upon a single officer to bear me out in my statement, as I consider that my character for veracity stands quite as high as that of Lieut.-General Sir Fred Middleton, and that backed up as I am by Dr. Orton—a gentleman of well known honor and integrity—I can afford to let the matter go before the public as it now stands.

Now in regard to the "second" heading. "Most, if not all of my senior officers," etc., etc. How is this statement borne out by that of the General in his letter to the *Toronto Telegram*, dated 23rd February, wherein he says: "As far as I remember the only two officers I talked with on the subject of retiring were Lord Melgund and Lieut.-Col. Boulton, who was strenuously opposed to retiring." The General having here affirmed that Lieut.-Col. Boulton was opposed to retiring, the only officer who could have advocated the "Retreat" was Lord Melgund, who is left alone to bear the stigma as sole representative of the "senior officers" referred to in the "Suppression of the N.-W. Rebellion, 1885."

Has it come to this, then, that Lord Melgund was the only officer in the Northwest field force whom the General deemed worthy of being consulted (with the exception of Lt.-Col. Boulton), and that on his advice alone he determined upon taking this step, which would have brought disaster and disgrace upon the whole force, and upon Canada also, had it been carried out? Why should Lord Melgund have been placed in such a position? The General was commanding a Canadian force pure and simple, composed of officers and men who had sacrificed their business and personal interests and comforts, and were risking their lives, in defence of their country—Canada,—and why should an English

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nobleman's opinion have been taken and theirs not even solicited, upon such a momentous question as was involved in that movement, when the honor of Canada, and the safety, not only of the whole force but also of every settler in the Northwest territory, was at stake? And why should he have totally ignored the opinions of such men as Colonels Williams, Straubenzie, Montizambert, Grasgett and MacKeand, Majors Jarvis, Boulton and Smith, and Captains Peters and French (throwing out myself, of course, as worthless, according to his statement), or rather, not even have consulted any of them (except Boulton), who were nearly all experienced officers in the Canadian service, and held important commands in the field of Batoche? Was it not enough for him to have gratified his own vanity by having appointed a viscount (a civilian) as his chief of staff, with the honorary rank of lieutenant-colonel—thus most unjustly placing him over the heads of the majority of these officers—without imperilling the safety of the whole force entrusted to his command by acting upon the sole advice of an officer of so little experience? I venture to say that there was not one of the officers whom I have above mentioned that would have given him this advice, but that all to a man would have expressed the same opinion as Major (now Lieut.-Col.) Boulton did, and counselled him to remain where he was, even were it at the risk of losing a large proportion of his force by so doing, which would have been as nothing compared with the result, which would have been the immediate consequence of that sign of weakness upon the thousands of armed Indians who were just lying in wait, and watching to see how the "cat jumped" before making up their minds to cast in their lot with the "Metis."

As the two statements of Lt.-Gen. Sir Fred. Middleton are quite incompatible with one another, he should either retract that made in the *U.S. Magazine*, so diabolizing and unjust to his Canadian officers, and erase from what might be handed down to posterity as a page of history that stigma which he has so undeservedly placed upon them in his "Suppression of the Northwest Rebellion 1885," or else again contradict his own statement, by taking back what he has just written over his own signature, in his letter to

the Toronto *Telegram* of the 23rd February, and account for the discrepancy the best way he can. In this matter I leave the choice to him and to the public, theirs of determining what amount of reliance is to be placed upon the—let us call it "memory" of a gentleman suffering from such aberration, or under such "hallucinations" (to use a *tutuque*) as poor Sir Frederick Middleton appears to be. I shall close my case for Canadian officers with the old Latin quotation:

"Et criminis ab uno discessum."

And now I come to the defence of my own character from the slanderous imputations cast upon it by the unmanly *inuidenos* and malicious insinuations contained in Lieut.-Gen. Sir Fred Middleton's letter now under answer. As no direct charge of any kind is made, but everything possibly conceivable left open to the imagination of the readers of his letter it will be necessary for me in dealing with such vagueness to give a slight sketch of some of the incidents of the campaign which took place during my short stay with the N. W. F. force, which covered only a period of fifty days, the greater portion of which was altogether uneventful, and at least to most of your readers would be uninteresting, but I shall have to begin at the very beginning in order to show what gave rise to the bitter feelings which General Middleton entertained towards me almost from the moment when we first met—strange to say—this very day nine years ago.

When I met the General at the station at Winnipeg at 7 a.m. on the 27th of March, 1885. I reported to him that I had a force of fine young fellows, already assembled in the Drill shed, awaiting his orders, of a little over 400 all told, nearly all of whom, particularly the cavalry and artillery (the latter consisting of about 60 officers and men, and the former a full troop of 35) were fairly well drilled and well up to their work, while of the remaining 300 odd (Winnipeg Rifles) with a very few exceptions all had had at least one season's drill, and that the whole were ready to move whenever he gave the order (120 of the rifles in fact having been despatched to Qu'Appelle station two days previously) and provided the cash for the purchase of the necessary horses which would be assembled in the barrack square for his selection at

9 a.m. To cut this short we had all the horses, that he considered necessary, purchased and passed the vets by about 3 p.m. but he positively refused to purchase any for the cavalry, who, he said should have horses of their own (it was a city troop) and he left behind 35 as fine young fellows as you could see anywhere, all fully uniformed and accoutred, and amongst whom were at least 20 of the best shots at the ranges, because they could not afford to purchase their own horses, which they would have been quite willing to have done could they have possibly raised the cash which was a sine qua non in those troublous times. He then engaged some young farmers from Stony Mountain, about fourteen or fifteen, who supplied their own horses at a cost of \$5 a day each to the Government. This force was afterwards increased at Qu'Appelle to 25 and were thenceforth known as 'French' scouts.' So much for his economy. He also stinted the Winnipeg Field Battery to 4 horses per gun, (9 prs) which at times, made it almost impossible for the guns to keep up with the column where the roads were hilly or heavy, and they were sometimes both, but always the latter. All this was contrary to my advice, and in spite of my urgent entreaties, as I knew the road well, having been over it the previous summer, as I told him. Well, we got away that evening and arrived at Qu'Appelle (or rather Troy) station next morning, where I had over three hundred teams in waiting, and the work of organizing the transport and commissariat commenced, which was ably carried out, the former by Mr. Bedson (the warden of Stony Mountain penitentiary, since deceased) and Mr. Secretan, and the latter by Captain Swinford Q.M. 90th Batt. Seeing that the General was kept busy from morning till night almost, with the help of his A.D.C., Capt. Wise, cyphering and decyphering telegrams, I offered to assist him, but he would not accept my assistance, though I told him I was well up in that work, nor did he confide in me one single word of what he was either sending or receiving, which I thought rather strange at the time, I being his second in command; but a few days later I found out the reason. On the 30th, acting under the General's orders, I moved for-

ward to Fort Qu'Appelle with half the force, and encamped right in front of the little village, which was supposed to be in danger of an attack from the 'File Hill' tribe of Indians, who were encamped some ten miles east of it. The following morning the General rode out from Troy station to inspect my camp, and with him came Lord Melgund, whom I had not had the honor of meeting before, as he had only arrived at Troy that morning. After inspecting my camp the General told me to write down some orders, which I did at his dictation, as follows:—"Viscount Lord Melgund having joined the N.W.F. force will assume the rank of lieutenant-colonel"—he paused for a while apparently thinking deeply, and then said quickly, as though a thought had just struck him, Oh, yes add this: "Lieut.-Col. Lord Melgund is appointed 'chief of staff' to the Major-General commanding."

I paused when he came to the words "chief of staff," and he said "why don't you write it down?" I replied, "I was just thinking, sir, how that would affect my position, to be plain with you." "Affect your position," said he rather angrily, "it does not affect your position at all, you are 'deputy adjutant general of the Northwest Field force,' and he is my 'chief of staff.' Oh! then that is all right sir, said I, and I wrote it down. He left the camp immediately afterwards, and I did not see him again until the day, but one, following (2nd April), when he rode into camp again and informed me that the rest of the column would be there in less than an hour, and told me to look out for a good piece of ground to encamp them on. Shortly after this, I came to report that I had selected a good dry spot (the snow was all melting and it was difficult to find dry ground), when he said to me suddenly, —as though he had just remembered something—"Oh, Houghton, by the way, I'm sorry to say I shall have to send you back to your headquarters, as I have had a telegram from the Minister pitching into me for bringing you away with the column, as he requires your services in Winnipeg." This I knew perfectly well could not be true, as I had received a telegram myself from the Minister, two days before the General's arrival in Winnipeg (25th March) to the following

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effect: "Don't wait for the General; go ahead yourself and protect Qu'Appelle, and let him follow." I could not help smiling, therefore, as I replied: "Well, that is the most extraordinary and unaccountable thing I ever heard of," and I repeated the words of the Minister's telegram to him. "Can you show me that telegram?" said he. I replied: "Certainly, Sir, as you seem to doubt my word," and I went to the tent of my orderly officer at once, and asked him to hand me the bundle of telegrams I had received from the Minister and others since the 22nd March, of which I had given him charge on the 27th, to pack with stationery, books, etc., which were required for use on the campaign. To my horror, the bundle was not there. It had been left behind (where I afterwards found it on my return, namely on my office table, where my orderly officer was packing the books and stationery, when I handed it to him.) I returned and told the General of this circumstance, to which he sneeringly and insultingly replied: "I thought you couldn't find it, and I'll believe in its existence when I see it, and no sooner." The grossness of this insult staggered me for a moment, as I had never anything like it put upon me before, and I had all I could do to master my temper. I succeeded, however, by an almost superhuman effort, and replied in measured terms "Then you shall believe in it sir," and saluting him stiffly I turned on my heel and walked straight to the telegraph office, and wired to my wife to Winnipeg "Procure and send copies of all telegrams from Minister since commencement of rebellion, immediately." The following morning brought the copies, and amongst them the one I wanted, with a letter from my wife informing me that, although copies of all the others had been handed her at once, *this one was withheld*, which she knew intuitively, was the one I required, and that had she not repeated the wording of it to the clerks, and called for a chair, stating that she would sit there until they produced it, if it were to take them twenty-four hours to find it, she believed they would never have given it to her, for some inexplicable reason or other. Whilst waiting, however, she was quite unexpectedly and accidentally rewarded by the perusal of

a copy of a telegram, which she had read before she noticed it was not addressed to me. It was to General Middleton and ran thus "Meldgund will be with you and accept position of 'chief of staff' and 'second in command.'" It was dated Ottawa, 25th March, and apparently signed by Lady Meldgund. Here, then, was the "cat out of the bag." Now I saw through the whole scheme, and determined upon the spot that I would fold up my temper and put it in my pocket, and stand anything sooner than allow such a plot as this to succeed. And well it was that I had made this resolution, for from that moment out nothing could exceed the persecution I had to undergo throughout the entire campaign. But, I anticipate. The following morning, as soon as I had perused my wife's letter and selected and pocketed the particular telegram, I threw myself accidentally in the General's way, and having told him the day previously that I was about to telegraph for the copy, he rose to the fly, and said to me in that taunting, sneering manner, in which he was quite an adept, "Well, where's that copy of the telegram you were to show me to-day? I thought you wouldn't be able to get it." "You made a bad guess then, sir," said I, pulling it out of my pocket and handing it to him. His countenance fell, and the sneer faded from his lips as he took the paper from my hand and slowly unfolded and perused its contents. Then he held it up to the light and examined it from every point of view, as though he thought it was a forgery, and finally folded it up carefully and slowly into a small space, with a far off look in his eyes, saying, as he deliberately deposited it in his own pocket, these exact words:—"Then all I can say is, that the Minister is a damn'd fool than I took him for." I replied gently, "Excuse me, sir, but that telegram belongs to me," at the same time holding out my hand to receive it. "Ugh! I'm sure I don't want it," said he, pulling it out of his pocket and almost thrusting it into my hand. I paused for a moment, hardly able to control my desire to complete his discomfiture, by asking him if he would oblige me with a peep at his telegram, but my better sense prevailed, as I wished to give him no chance whatever to accuse me of impertinence, for I well knew that he

would have taken advantage of the very slightest pretext, to wire to the Minister requesting my recall, and, as I stated before, I had steeled myself to put up with all his "insolence of office," sooner than play his game for him.

Nothing more worth mentioning transpired after that until we reached Humboldt, except that he never lost an opportunity of belittling me before any group of officers with whom he might happen to see me talking in camp, or even in the staff mess, where, should I ever hazard an opinion upon any subject, he would always make it a point to sit upon me, by some rude and ungentlemanly remark such as "Oh! what do you know about a gatling? Did you ever see one?" I only give this as a specimen of the way in which he invariably treated any remark I might happen to make, or view I might express, even though he might have known that many of the topics upon which I touched were such as I had far better opportunities of being informed upon than he had. The specimen I have given above occurred shortly before we left Qu'Appelle, when he first got news of the two gatlings being on the way out, which he announced to a group of officers of which I was one; and was in reply to my expressing satisfaction, and saying that I thought one would be a most useful adjunct to the force. He then turned to the other officers, few of whom I daresay ever had seen a gatling, and said, with a sardonic chuckle, "I'll tell you what I'm going to do with them, I'm going to saddle them both on *Ott'r.*" Sorry he was in a few weeks afterwards at Fish Creek that he had not brought one with him, as there was one of those very opportunities for the use of one to the greatest advantage, when instead of leaving a handful of about fifty of the enemy in the coulee to claim a victory, as they did, and do to this day, he might have cleaned the whole lot out or caused them to surrender by about one minute's shower of bullets properly directed upon their position. I will not weary your readers with any more of this, but suffice it to say, that I ceased to open my mouth in the mess, or anywhere in his presence, except on duty, and I performed all the duties that fell to my lot, or that he would permit me to perform, in such a manner as to defy his criticism or cen-

sure, which I always felt, he was constantly on the watch for an opportunity to bestow upon me. I trust your readers will excuse my apparent egotism when I say that I don't believe there was one officer in the whole force who worked harder for the good and weal of the column than I did, and I think I will be borne out in this statement by almost every officer and man of the force. I had one partner or fellow-sufferer, and that was Major-General Laurie, who overtook us at the edge of the Salt Plains on the 10th of April with a view to offering his services in any capacity where they could be best utilized. Although he reported himself to General Middleton an hour and a half, or two hours, before our mess time, he (Middleton) never so much as invited him to join our meal, and he had to go to C School camp to get his dinner, as when I told him of the terms upon which the General and I stood, he would not accept my invitation, and very wisely so. Still this did not prevent him from coming in for his full share of indignities. When Laurie asked for a mount the following day he was told by Gen. Middleton to go and help himself out of a lot of shaganappy H. B. ponies, of which the biggest was not twelve hands' high, so whilst Gen. Middleton had two large *stare* horses, constantly ridden by his grooms, he allowed General Laurie to ride one of those miserable little brutes, with his toes nearly touching the ground, never so much as addressing a word to him in a whole day's march. Laurie both tented and rode with me all the time, however, and we had our fun in a quiet way, watching the General (Middleton) mounting his 16¹ hands horse in the morning and after lunch. When I say mounting, I mean climbing on, with the assistance of two or three grooms and a crockery box. One of these horses, indeed (Sam), of which he speaks in his 'suppression of the Northwest rebellion,' was mine by right, as I purchased him for \$225, by private sale, for my own use, finding him being led away when the Government limit of \$175 was declared, but when we got to Troy the General appropriated him most unceremoniously, claiming that he had right to the best horse in the outfit, although he well knew that I had purchased him for myself, under the circumstances above-

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related. I let him have him for peace sake, and sorry I was afterwards for having done so, as I got no thanks for my generosity, as the sequel proved. Laurie only accompanied us three days across the Salt Plains and then returned from Humboldt a 'sadder and wiser man' than when he joined us. He could no longer brook such slights and indignities from a man far his junior in Her Majesty's service, and whom he held in utter contempt. He expressed his sympathy for me at parting, and congratulated me warmly for my pluck in holding on to my position under such trying circumstances. He said that the last three days had been the most humiliating of his whole life. He now resides in London at 47 Porchester terrace, and if any one should doubt my word (for, indeed, it does appear almost incredible), I refer him to General Laurie himself for corroboration of my statement.

Well, to resume my narrative, at Humboldt I ascertained that Messrs. Bedson and McDowell were to start that evening (April 13) for Prince Albert to communicate the General's position to Lt.-Col. Irvine (in command of the Northwest Mounted Police, of whom there were about 200 at that station) and instruct him to be on the north side of the Saskatchewan, opposite to Batoche, on the morning of the 23rd of April, to make a combined attack upon the rebels' stronghold there, which seemed to me to be a very good plan, and although the General had not said a word to me about it, or confided his project to me in any way, still I determined to help him through in every way in my power; for, in spite of the General's ill-treatment of me, I had lost none of my interest in the success of the expedition or the welfare of the force, which I had myself been chiefly instrumental in raising and in which I had so many warm friends. It may seem strange to your readers, but it is nevertheless true, that although the General knew all this time that I was second in command, not only by right of my position as D.A.G. in the district in which all this trouble was occurring, but also by actual seniority, and must have known that had anything happened to him through sickness, accident, or otherwise, that I would have immediately assumed command of the force, yet he took the great-

est pains to conceal from me what his plans were, or what reinforcements were expected, and, in fact, every information which would have been useful to me in such an eventuality. Still, I generally managed to keep myself pretty well posted, at least in regard to our own column, and I was egotistical enough to think that I could readily have adapted myself to the situation at any moment and carried on the campaign entirely regardless of any of his pre-conceived plans.

We lay over one day at Humboldt and then resumed our march for Clarke's Crossing. On the morning of the second day the General took an escort of Boulton's M. I. and C. School under Major Smith, and made a double march to Clarke's Crossing, and here the first fracas occurred between me and Lord Melgund.

Previous to this he had been in the habit of halting the column, and ordering the resumption of the march just as he chose, and regarding him as the General's mouthpiece I never saw my way clearly to interfering with him, but on the morning that the General went on I had made the usual ten-minute halt about an hour from camp. Melgund was some distance ahead at the time and rode back to see what we had halted for. I told him it was the usual practice. He seemed rather put out, and got off his horse and lay on the ground. A hail-storm was going on just as we halted and lasted over a quarter of an hour, so I did not order the advance until it was over, as it was pretty severe and right in our teeth, but the moment it ceased I gave the order to fall in and resume the march. Upon this he jumped from the ground and addressing me in a severe tone of voice said: "Colonel Houghton, sir, you really must not hurry the men like that, you must give them time to rest." For the first time we had come fairly into collision and I saw that my opportunity had arrived to undeceive him as to the position he imagined he held in the force, so I very quietly but firmly sat upon him by replying, "Lord Melgund, you seem to forget, sir, that I command this column to-day, and not you. I will thank you, sir, to attend to your own business, and leave me to attend to mine." He seemed completely taken aback and I believe,

then, for the first time discovered that he was not second in command. He got on his horse without saying a word and rode on ahead of the column with the scouts and I don't think a dozen words ever passed between us since, nor indeed had very many before that. We arrived at Clarke's Crossing about noon on the following day (17th April) after a march of about eighteen miles, and the men feeling very fresh I got out some of the old ammunition (brought to Winnipeg by Gen. Wolseley in the first Red River expedition), partly for the purpose of testing it and partly to give the men some practice, which all were eager to obtain, some few of them chiefly who had never fired a shot until they arrived at Qu'Appelle. Next day (18th) we lay over to allow the 10th Grenadiers to come up, they being just a day's march behind. They arrived early in the afternoon, and shortly afterwards the General called me to his tent to take orders as usual. The orders were that the column would march at the usual hour (7 sharp) in the morning in the direction of Batoche (which was four easy days' march from Clarke's Crossing), with a few other minor details not worth mentioning. I had just taken this down and was leaving his tent to promulgate it in the usual way when the assistant transport officer entered in a hurried way and said, "General, the teamsters say they will not move to-morrow, as they have no oats for their horses." "Oh, they really must go, oats or no oats," said the General, "as I am bound to be at Batoche on the morning of the 23rd." "Well, they simply say they won't, and I don't see how you are going to make them," replied the officer. I had paused in the door of the tent, and was apparently an uninterested listener, until the General replied: "That's very awkward, indeed. It's going to upset all my plans. I'm sure I don't know what to do about it," were nearly the very words he used. I turned back into the tent and asked the officer if he knew how long it would be before grain (which was on the way up) would arrive. He said he could not tell positively, but he thought it would be four or five days. I then turned to the General and asked him if it was very important that he should be at Batoche on the morning of the 23rd, to which he re-

plied that of course it was or he would not have said so. I said: "Well, sir, if you will leave things in my hands I will undertake that the teams do move to-morrow, and that you get there in time to keep your engagement." "What engagement? Who told you I had an engagement? I only told you that I wished to be there at that time, and how do you propose to get the teamsters to move, if the transport officer can't do it?" This was said with the usual sneer, but, as I said before, my temper was in my pocket, and, therefore, I coolly answered him: "The transport officer has no bayonets at his command, sir, but I have, with your permission, and I propose putting a bayonet with a man behind it, into each team, or, if you prefer it, to march the teamsters as prisoners and put soldiers to drive the teams," adding, as I looked him full in the face, "if your appointment is a very important one, sir, such a trifling as horses going a day or two without oats should not be allowed to stand in the way, especially as there is every prospect of getting oats to-morrow night, or next day at furthest, as we are now within a day's march of one of the finest farming countries in the Northwest; and, meantime, we have plenty of hay." He replied that he would do nothing so barbarous, and that, as that was the only alternative, he would stay where he was until the oats came up. The sentiment was, I admit, most praiseworthy under ordinary circumstances, but a trifling out of place in that critical situation, and I am convinced was the cause of much unnecessary loss of human life, as had this engagement with Colonel Irvine been strictly kept the whole rebellion would have subsided into the proverbial "tempest in a teapot," and I have grave doubts if a shot would ever have been fired by the enemy, or rather, the unfortunate, misused, ill-directed, badly-advised rebels. Of course, the General immediately dispatched another courier to Prince Albert to advise Irvine that the "rendezvous was off," but as he was captured on the way, and only released from the prison cellar at Batoche on the 12th of May, poor Irvine was left entirely in the dark as to the General's movements, and although he was on hand at the appointed time (23rd April), and even kept hovering around

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the vicinity for three or four days, not being able to find any trace or get any word of General Middleton's column, he was obliged to retire to Prince Albert to protect the citizens, who were in a state of mortal terror (I mean, of course, the women), and there await further orders from the "Great Chief," which, though daily expected, never arrived. This did not save Irvine's name, however, or that of the splendid force he commanded, from being dragged through the mire by the "Doughty Knight" in order to cover his own egregious blunder. He christened them "Gophers," and although I was not there, I am told that when they turned out to receive him on his 'triumphant entry' into Prince Albert, he treated them with the most supreme contempt, scarcely even deigning to return their salute as he passed along their line.

We remained at Clarke's Crossing until the 23rd April, during which time I, with the assistance of Mr. King, the ferryman from Saskatoon, put up the ferry cable, and got everything into running order for the crossing of the left column for which I see the General has given credit to Capt. Haig, who on the contrary, after we had it in good running order, removed the platform and windlass, and then abandoned it as worthless, as it would not work. Mr. King and I, however, put it back again in its proper position and the whole of the left column crossed on it on the 21st of April.

The two columns recommenced the march towards Batoche on the 23rd (being in sight of one another nearly all the time), and the "right," with which I remained, camped at McIntosh's house about eighteen miles down the river.

Here I learned from a scout in the course of the evening that he had discovered a large quantity of grain in a house about four miles from the camp and I determined upon capturing it during the night. Ascertaining from him that there was from three to four tons of grain there, I took two waggons with twelve men of the 90th under Captain Clarke, and an escort of ten men of Boulton's M.I., under Captain Gardner, and started from camp about 11 p.m. The house belonged to another McIntosh (brother to the one at whose house the camp was pitched) and was on the main road to Batoche. The night

being bright moonlight I took the precaution of keeping the waggons about a quarter of a mile behind, and myself and the mounted escort with curbs and all other rattling material either removed or muffled, rode in front at a fast walk. On nearing the house we went very cautiously as we could see some carts drawn up at the door, which the scout informed me were not there when he had prowled around there in the dusk. When we reached the door, we saw by the moonlight that a considerable number of men had, but a very short time before us, been there, as their tracks were thick in the dew, which lay heavily on the ground. We also found six brand new 'Red River' carts pulled up in line, with harness between the shafts of each. I could hardly restrain my men from giving chase, as they said that judging from the freshness of the tracks in the dew, they could not have left more than a minute or two, but I told them that by so doing they would not only imperil the whole party unnecessarily, but would entirely defeat the object for which we had come there. Captain Haig (who accompanied me at his own request), Capt. Gardner and myself then dismounted and went into the house, having first placed the scouts in a fan-shaped cordon around the side of the house nearest Batoche, and about three hundred yards radius from it, with orders to fire directly upon any men they might see approaching, and then gallop back to us. By this time the waggons had arrived and Captain Clarke so disposed six of his men as to be in a position to cover their retreat immediately the scouts should fire and open out in retreating to the rear of the house, when they were to dismount and take post behind the waggons. As soon as this was arranged we took the remaining six men into the house (on the table of which, by-the-bye, we found a plate of fried bacon still quite warm) and with the assistance of some two dozens sacks we found on the loft we soon cleared out the entire lot, which filled the waggons completely with loose grain, besides afterwards filling all the sacks, which we then piled on top, making at the lowest calculation a ton and a half per waggon. This done, we strung the Red River carts behind the waggons and

commenced our retreat in the same formation, with the riflemen forming a rear guard between the waggons and the scouts who followed at about two hundred yards in rear of them. Our progress was necessarily very slow, in consequence of the heavy loads in the waggons, and it was broad daylight long before we got back with our booty, which was just half-past four o'clock or half an hour before the reveille sounded. None of us, of course, went to bed and I did not even rest as I went to give orders and see about the distribution of the grain, which was only sufficient to give about four good feeds per horse in camp, and had, therefore, to be carefully divided out. The six Red River carts I handed over, with their harness, to Major Boulton for the use of his corps, and by the time this was all done I had scarcely time to snatch a bite of bread and meat in my hand and remount my poor horse, which, however, I had taken the precaution of feeding well with grain before I did anything else.

Now, when we had come to camp that evening I had told General Middleton that in riding round the environs of the camp, as was my usual custom before dismounting, I had noticed a very dangerous place along the river bank, which was a sudden depression, and flat at the bottom, with open timber and a fringe of thick brush on top, and I had reported to him that a night attack could easily be made by the enemy, using this as a means of approach, and that by so doing they would emerge from the hollow in such a position as to attack us on our left rear, not being themselves visible owing to the conformation of the ground until within 500 yards of us, and I had asked his permission to put a strong outpost there. He simply answered me in his usual sneering tone of voice: "What rubbish you do talk. Don't you know that Indians never attack at night?" I replied: "In the first place, sir, excuse me for reminding you that you are not fighting Indians, but half-breeds, and, in the second place, that even if Indians don't attack at night, that is the very time they creep to their places for attacking at the first break of dawn, when every man in this camp, with the exception of the sentries, outposts and guards,

will be in their soundest sleep, you and I amongst the rest." "Oh! have your way," he said, and accordingly I did put a strong outpost there. Now what turned out to be the facts of the case? As we afterwards learned from one of Gabriel Dumont's reports to Riel, subsequently taken at Batoche, they had actually been contemplating an attack upon us that very night, whether by that means of approach or not I do not know, but should judge so, as from their perfect knowledge of the locality I feel sure they would have selected it as the best. It is now nearly nine years since I read, or rather had it translated to me (it was in French). It was something like this (and if this should meet the eye of Dumont, I should much like to have him write me on the subject): "I contemplated making a night attack upon the enemy when encamped at McIntosh's house, but was deterred by the following considerations: First, because I found the enemy on the alert, and mistook, what I since found out to be a foraging party, for an advance patrol; and, secondly, because I was disappointed at the non-arrival of some hundred or so Indians that I expected to join me that night from Poundmaker's band, but who did not arrive, so I thought it better to fall back to Fish Creek, where I had a plan to ambush them in the morning. My plans were frustrated by a fool in a buckskin coat, who, seeing a milch cow upon the prairie, rode after her and tried to drive her into the enemy's cortege, instead of which he drove her right on to me, and, seeing I was discovered, I fired at him in the hope that the shot would not be noticed, as he was always firing shots himself at birds or rabbits, as my scouts have frequently reported. I unfortunately missed him, and my shot being mistaken for the signal all my men commenced firing and exposed their position before the enemy had fallen into the trap I had laid for them." I do not for one moment pretend to say that the above is by any means verbatim, but it is about the gist of the report as translated to me.

Thus, it will be seen, that on this occasion I was, partly at least, instrumental in saving the force from a night attack which might have been attended with most serious results.

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We left camp at about the usual hour on the 24th (7 o'clock), and as was my custom, I remained until all had passed, including the teams, and then rode to the head of the column to see that all was right, and then back again to the extreme rear to see that there were no stragglers, but that all were keeping pretty close up. This morning, however, there was some delay in the starting of the teams, which on riding back to the zareba I found was caused by some loads having had to be crossed over the river. I stayed with them using my best endeavor to assist Mr. Secretan, but in spite of all we could both do more than half the teams could not get ready for a long time, and when I found that the head of the column had got nearly three miles ahead, and that quite a number of waggons were still in the zareba, I galloped to the front, where General Middleton was as usual riding with the scouts about three or four hundred yards ahead of the advance guard. I overtook him just as he was passing the house where I had got the grain only a few hours before and told him that that was the place where the enemy had evidently been in considerable force the previous midnight, as I had seen by their tracks in the dew, and pointing out to him the possibility that some of the enemy might be still lurking in considerable force amongst the numerous coulees with which the locality was beset. I begged of him to call a halt to allow the teams to close up to the column. He refused to halt, so I galloped back to the zareba, telling all the teamsters as I met them to gallop up to the column as they were in a very dangerous place and might easily be cut off by the enemy straggling so far from the column as they were. Some of them did as I told them but others paid no attention. I did not halt until I reached the spot where the zareba had been, from which the last team was then just starting. We made him gallop, and Mr. Secretan and I rode one at each side, making every teamster put his team into a gallop as we caught up with him. In that way we soon overtook the column (which had halted for a little while shortly after I left the General, but was now again advancing), and formed up the teams two deep, so that

they might all be under the better protection of the baggage guard. It was most fortunate that they had got into that position, for before we had gone another quarter of a mile the enemy opened fire upon us from the front, and right and left front, from different coulees in which they were concealed, and almost immediately afterwards (I understand) endeavored to cut off the baggage. Of this, however, I can say nothing of my own knowledge, for as soon as the firing commenced the General detached two companies of the 90th, under Major Boswell, to the left front attack and directed me to go with them and cross the creek and dislodge a party of the rebels from a house on the opposite side from which they were firing. As we approached the creek several shots were fired at us out of the coulee but none took effect, and as we came to the edge of the coulee we saw several men making towards Batoche, some riding and a good many running. The house was empty when we got there, but as I did not see anyone come out of it, I presume they must have done so while we were down in the coulee. I then changed direction to the right and advanced towards the big coulee, where I saw several men on horseback, but I was afraid to fire upon them for fear they might be our own scouts, who were also in plain clothes, and it was too far off to distinguish them. I put my men in a small hollow and went forward a short distance myself to see what they were. Just then a volley came up from there, evidently directed at me, and hit one of the men lying behind me, so I immediately ordered the men to come to the crest of the little ridge behind which they were lying and open fire on them. As soon as they did so the enemy all ran or rode away towards Batoche and we could see no more, though shots still continued to come out of the thicket. About this time I saw the General signaling me to come to him, so I moved my men across to the right to where he was. He then disposed them along the brow of the coulee. Shortly afterwards I saw a party of the 90th cross the creek in a bend and move towards the enemy. I rode down to them and, dismounting and leaving my horse behind, overtook them. Seeing the creek crossing again between us and the enemy, within about

sixty yards of the latter, I told the men to make a rush for the creek and rally there and led the way myself, accompanied by Captain Ruttan and Lieutenant Stewart. We received a volley, but without effect, and before they could reload we were safe in the creek, which had high banks, nearly sufficient to cover a man's head standing. Here I found that besides the two officers named and Capt. Wise, who had joined us in the rush, we had but six bayonets, which of course I did not consider sufficient to continue the charge with, so I called to the men (who I knew were not far behind) to reinforce as soon as possible, and we would make a charge. Whilst waiting I crept up the bank, and crawled towards the enemy, myself hidden by the chapparell. I got a good view of their position from the spot which I reached, and saw several of them not more than sixty yards from me. About this time the General came near the crest of the coulee and called out to me to retire as he was about to open artillery fire over our heads. I did so with great difficulty but fortunately without losing a man. Unfortunately my horse which had followed me into the creek could not be got out on account of the high steep banks. I knew, however, that she was safe for the same reason, and fully calculated on getting her back later on in the day. I then worked round to where the General was and reported to him what I had seen of the enemy's position, and asked him to let me call for fifty volunteers (that was about the number I calculated the enemy at) and make a bayonet charge upon them from the crest of the coulee, right behind their position, which I felt certain then, and now well know from circumstances which have since come to my knowledge, that had I then been permitted to do so I could have easily captured the whole of them, or driven them out of their cover. In fact, I have since learned that in any event of that kind they were prepared to surrender at once. Had this charge been permitted I don't think there would have been any Batoche, nor indeed so many men lost that day at Fish Creek, as this was only about 12 o'clock as nearly as I can now judge, and we had a good many men wounded after that, though I don't think any were killed. Our men were

formed all round the coulee in such a position as to prevent them getting out and so we remained until about half-past four when the General told me to remain on the ground, in charge of two companies, watching the coulee, while he retired the remainder of the force to a camping ground about a mile and a quarter away, near the Saskatchewan, on the opposite bank of which the greater part of our left column still were. I was to watch until he was clear of a certain place and then retire by signal, so as not to disturb the enemy in the coulee, or let them know we were slipping away. I did as I was ordered, greatly to my chagrin, however, the more especially as this ended all hope of recovering my horse. It was now commencing to rain pretty heavily, but I was so overcome with fatigue and want of sleep that, having given my orders for the retreat as prescribed by the General, I lay down upon the wet grass, beside Capt. Forrest, of the 90th, and, having directed him to watch the retreat and awaken me at the proper time, I fell fast asleep in the pouring rain. I could not have slept more than fifteen or twenty minutes at the outside, as, when I awoke I still saw the heads of our retiring men just disappearing over the ridge. I then gave the signal to my men, who retired steadily in skirmishing line, and ready to resist attack from any quarter. Just as we got to the height of land before spoken of, a lot of horsemen appeared from the coulee on our (then) right rear, and were plainly seen by Captain Young and Col. Montizambert (who had come back to assist me), as well as by myself, the former asserting positively that he had counted one hundred and twenty-five. They were about 500 yards distant and commenced jeering loudly, upon which I halted my men with the intention of giving them a volley, but the moment they saw the men face about they knew what was coming, and disappeared immediately into the coulee from whence they had just emerged. I then continued the retreat, and as I came within about 600 yards of the camp I passed the General, who was just putting an outpost there, and reported this matter to him. He deliberately told me that "it was not the case," and that I must be laboring under

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an "hallucination." Fortunately Montizambert and Young were not out of earshot, so I called them back to corroborate my statements, but he as much as told all three of us that we were telling an "untruth," asserting that it was pure and simple imagination on our part, and adding, with great emphasis, "And even had it been true, you should never have said a word about it." This was satisfactory (?) to me, you may easily imagine. Here was I, the second in command, reporting so serious a matter as that to my "chief," told that I was either a liar or a fool, to put it into plain language, and told that even had it been true I should not have reported it to him. Well, I went on to the camp, overtaking my command and sending them to their different battalions (one company was of the 10th and the other the 90th), and then went to see what sort of a position the camp occupied, and make my usual tour of inspection of the surroundings. My tent was being pitched, but the baggage had not yet been distributed, so, although I was soaking wet, I could get no change of clothes. When I came back it was getting dusk, and our dinner (a pretty rough one that day) was ready, so I went to the mess tent first, but was too tired to eat, so went to my tent, where I found my small dunnage box, but no blankets. I could not get my boots off as I had been standin' so long above my knees in water in the creek that day, and my bootjack was rolled in my blankets, so I took a small eider-down quilt out of my box, and taking off my water-soaked patrol, and substituting my great coat, which was dry, I wrapped myself in the eider-down quilt, and, with my saddle, with a couple of flannel shirts on it for a pillow, fell fast asleep in a moment. Before lying down I had presumed that my servant would be in shortly with my blankets, and that I would then be able to change my wet clothes, and get into them—the blankets. When I awoke for the first time I was shivering, and my teeth were chattering like castanets. I jumped up and lighted a match and glanced around the tent to see where my blankets were, but everything was just as before I fell asleep. I looked at my watch and found that it was now four, and on looking out of my tent I saw that the dawn was already quite visible. I turned back in despair, rolled

myself again in the eider-down, and miserable and cold as I was, actually fell asleep again. I slept until breakfast time, when I went to the mess tent, but could eat nothing. I was still shivering all over, and my teeth would not stop rattling. Just then the fall-in for the funeral parade sounded, and being determined to pay the last tribute to my brave comrades who had fallen the day before (six as well as I remember), I went to Dr. Codd's tent and asked him if he could give me something to brace me up for the occasion. Seeing the state I was in he opened his medicine chest and poured me out a half a tumbler of what turned out to be brandy, and told me to drink that off at once and that I would feel better. I did so and went straight on parade just as the General was about to commence the funeral service. As soon as it was over I went to the General, and telling him the facts of the case, asked his permission to go and lie down for a few hours. He replied, "Oh! yes, go where you like, I don't want you." I then went in search of my blankets and found that as they happened to be the first that came to hand they had been given to the wounded, so I got a few pair out of store myself, (my servant was down at the burial), and getting a man to help me off with my boots, I turned in and slept soundly until about one o'clock, when I got up quite recovered and went to the mess tent and ate a hearty lunch.

I never heard any more or thought any more about this episode afterwards until I heard many months subsequently through a friend of mine in Winnipeg that the General had spread the report broadcast that I was drunk at Fish Creek. I heard the same afterwards from friends in British Columbia, and again at Ottawa and here. Under those circumstances I am not surprised if he had "authority to send me away," and that was what he wanted all along. But when he got it, he dared not use it because he knew well that I could have cleared myself at once if any charge had been made against me by him on that or any other score. The General says he placed Lieut.-Col. Straubenzee over my head as second in command, and that "for reasons best known to myself I did not attempt to remonstrate." I regret very much to have to

say, that this statement is false from beginning to end. I myself wrote, at the General's dictation, the order referred to, and it simply appointed Lieut.-Col. Straubenzee to command of the infantry brigade, and at the same time Lieut.-Col. Montizambert to the command of the mounted brigade.

How could I ever have imagined that he was appointing Col. Straubenzee "second in command" when Col. Williams, who, though perhaps a younger man, was ten years senior to him. Was there anything wrong about Williams that he should be passed over, as the General says I was? Whatever opinion the General may have formed of Williams' ability subsequently, he surely could not have done so on the day of their joint arrival at Fish Creek by the steamer Northcote.

I thought that perhaps he had given that appointment to Straubenzee, because Williams had his regiment to look after, but had anything happened to the General during the fight at Batoche, it goes without saying that I should have immediately assumed the command of the force by virtue of my position of deputy adjutant-general in my own district.

Next to me, Williams would most undoubtedly have taken command, as the appointment of D.A.G. carries no status outside of his district. I think I have said all that is necessary to put the public in a position to judge between General Sir Fred. Middleton and me in regard to the statements, or, rather I should say, "insinuations," made against my character by that "ex-officer." Had he made any specific charge against me for either incapacity or misconduct this letter need not have been one-fourth so long, but the fact of his having

attacked me in the dark, has necessitated my writing this "much too lengthy letter," in order to guard myself at all points from his insidious and venomous attacks. As I have dealt with Batoche in the beginning of this letter I will spare your readers any further details on that subject beyond mentioning the fact, that the hour actually appointed for the troops meeting the Northcote at Batoche on the 9th of May was 8 a.m. and not 9 as stated in the General's official report of the 31st May, 1885, and hence all the trouble to that boat, and all on board of her, as well as the loss of her usefulness on that occasion. She was on time, but the General was just an hour behind.

I could go further, and prove that the General's persecution of me did not cease with the rebellion, but that he continued to pursue me with the utmost acrimony until the very day of his departure from Canada, and I have in my possession two official retractions of charges preferred against me, or statements calculated to injure me with the department.

I shall not, however, weary your readers with these matters, as I fear I have already trespassed far too much upon their patience. I shall only add that all I have written in this letter I am in a position to prove if called upon to do so at any time, that is to say, with the exception of private conversations which took place between the General and myself as stated in my letter, in which cases I must leave it to the public to choose between my veracity and that of Lieut.-General Sir Frederick Middleton K.C.MG., C.B.

C. F. HOUGHTON, Lieut.-Col.
Montreal, March 27, 1894.

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